DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 270 CG 023 424

AUTHOR Adams, Nancy; And Others
TITLE The Effects of Divorce on Achievement, Behavior, and Attendance of Seventh Grade Students.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Attendance; *Divorce; Family Structure; *Grade 7; Junior High Schools; *Junior High School Students; Nuclear Family; *Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that the academic achievement, behavior, and school attendance of students affected by parental divorce would be significantly different from the achievement, behavior, and attendance of students from intact families. This study was conducted to determine if seventh grade students from divorced families exhibited more problems with academic achievement and behavior, and if they had higher absence rates than those students from intact families. Subjects included two groups of 30 randomly selected students, from a middle school in North Carolina; one group consisted of children from divorced families and the other group consisted of children from intact families. Family structure was the independent variable; dependent variables were achievement on the California Achievement Test, school attendance as measured by the Student Information Management System, and school behavior as measured by discipline infractions compiled by the teachers. The findings indicated no significant difference in the areas of achievement or attendance. A significant difference was found in the area of behavior. (NB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED333270

# The Effects of Divorce on Achievement, Behavior, and Attendance of Seventh Grade Students

Nancy Adams, Greta Miller, and Phillip Reavis
Gary Reglin
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

CG023424

This research was conducted while the authors were graduate students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The data was collected from Greta Miller's seventh grade math students.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Running head: EFFECTS OF DIVORCE



"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Nancy Adams
Greta Miller
Phillip Reavis
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if seventh grade students from divorced families exhibited more problems with academic achievement, behavior, and higher absence rates than those students from intact families. The population of this study consisted of seventh grade China Grove Middle School students from China Grove, NC. The sample consisted of two groups of 30 randomly selected students. One group consisted of children from divorced families and the other of children from intact families. A causal comparative design with T-test data from the SPSSX statistical computer program was used. Findings indicated no significant difference in the areas of achievement ($t=1.45$; $p=.15$) or attendance ($t=.37$; $p=.71$). A significant difference was found in the area of behavior ($t=-3.61$; $p=.001$). This research would imply that teachers, administrators, and counselors should be aware of the needs of these children.

## Introduction

Due to changing family structure and the fact that one out of two marriages ends in divorce (Garvin, 1984 p. 6), it is the belief of these researchers that academic achievement, behavior and school attendance will be significantly different in those families where the student has been affected by divorce.

These researchers were interested in discovering if there were problems in these areas in order to better meet the needs of students from homes where a divorce had taken place. Student's needs would be served more effectively if teachers could anticipate certain problems before they occurred.

Changes in curriculum might be an outcome that would be necessary. Support services such as extra counseling for these children would be helpful.

### Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine if divorce had any effect on the academic achievement, behavior, or attendance of seventh grade students. The specific questions that were addressed in this research project are as follows:

1. Do students from divorced homes score significantly lower ($p < .05$) on the California Achievement Tests than those from intact families?

2. Do Students from divorced homes exhibit significantly more incidences ($p < .05$) of behavior problems that those from intact families?

3. Do students from divorced families exhibit significantly higher incidences ($p < .05$) of absences than those from intact families?

Theoretical Framework

"Behavior is the product of learning. We are both the product and the producer of environment" (Corey, 1977 p. 287). Do students react differently in an environment which is created by an intact family than they would in an environment where there is a divorce? Some learning theorist "emphasize the processes by which behavior is formed from the outside, by the external environment" (Crain, 1985). If these theorist have merit, it would seem that divorce would have a direct influence on the achievement, behavior, and attendance of children whose families are affected. "Bandura, in particular, argues that in social

situations we learn a great deal through imitation..." (Crain, 1985 p. 227). There is a great deal of stress, aggression, sadness, and frustration during the breakup of a marriage. If these are indeed learned behaviors, it follows that students from divorced families would have more problems.

## Review of the Literature

"More than 1.5 million children under the age of 18 are affected each year by family breakups, and nearly half the children born in 1980 will live in single-parent families at some point before they reach 18. Furthermore, in 1987, the census Bureau reported that over half the babies born that year would spend part of their childhood in one-parent families" (Berger, 1989). Given the dynamics of this ever growing population, schools must learn to adjust to the needs of these children. In order to meet the needs of these children, studies have focused on the areas of deficit, mainly achievement and behavior. Review of the literature dealing with children from divorced families and intact families concentrated on achievement and behavior. Some took into consideration

other variables such as attendance, self-concept, socioeconomic status of the family, teacher perception, age of the child, family mobility, or health.

Findings on achievement have shown contradictions. In A study done by Janice Hammond on 165 children in grades 3 through 6 of children from homes where the parents were either separated or divorced, no significant differences were found in mathematics or reading achievement (Hammond, 1979).

In contrast to the Hammond study, a study done by the NAESP and the Kettering Foundation concluded that children from the one-parent family show lower achievement than the children from intact families. The NAESP and Kettering Foundation study included a larger number of students from many parts of the country at many different educational levels (Dawson, 1981). The Kettering Foundation Study disregarded other variables and did a simple comparison of student achievement. The results showed higher achievement for students in two parent homes, including those who lived in families where remarriages had occurred.

Students from one parent homes showed lower achievement (Zakariya, 1982).

In a study cited by Edgar, comparisons were made of students from single parent families versus intact families on the basis of standardized testing and teacher's ratings of students scholastic performance. The results were that teachers expected lower achievement from students from single parent families than was actually shown by the standardized testing (Edgar, 1982). Whether the studies show significant results or not "prior research suggests that teacher expectations of student achievement may influence the students' actual performance" (Hammond, 1979).

Research also indicates boys whose fathers are absent showed a difference in achievement. Whether by death, separation or divorce, boys achieved significantly lower than those from intact homes (Garvin, 1984).

Another important issue in the literature was that of behavior problems for students from single parent families versus students from intact families. The most commonly exhibited behaviors and concerns of

middle school students are guilt, anxiety, fantasies, and problems with peer relationships (Morgan, 1985). Also mentioned in another study are nervousness, extreme moodiness, psychosomatic problems, and a sudden lack of confidence (Garvin, 1984). One study indicated that discipline problems were greater for students from one parent homes. This was tested by the number of times that the student was sent to the office. Although this difference was not significant, the offences seemed to be more serious. The incidence of suspension and expulsion was greater (Staff, 1980). "Students from the one parent ... homes represent only one-fourth of the school population. Yet they are suspended twice as often in the elementary grades as students living with two parents, and they comprise nearly 40% of the high school suspension cases" (Brown, 1980).

In a 1957 study done by Monahan and Toby, the results were that single parent homes were said to have played a major factor in the delinquency of children. (Voza, 1984). Furthermore, "a rise in aggression was noted in children of all ages.

Increased irritability, outbursts of temper, and pushing and hitting of siblings and peers" (Kelly and Wallerstein, 1979 p. 54) was noted in students from one parent homes.

Similar findings appeared in Ellison's study. Differences in classroom behavior appeared. Children from single parent families directed their attention toward teachers and peers rather than academic affairs (Fuller, 1986).

Research shows "the main problem seen in boys whose fathers are absent is the manifestation of "excessive masculine" traits, which frequently are expressed through delinquent behavior" (Morgan, 1985).

Further data indicate that there are significantly more behavior problems with children from single parent homes. Among those listed are extreme anger, lying, stealing, enuresis, and disobedience. In 1957 it was shown that approximately 50% of delinquents came from broken homes (Russell, 1957). It should be noted that the term broken home is felt to have negative connotations and is not used in the later research. "The idea is that children from a

broken home are trouble makers. The term implies the stereotype of a child from a home that is incomplete, one in which the offspring are neglected, indisciplined, and somehow abnormal" (Kohn, 1979, p. 44).

Similar to achievement, the assessment of behavior is subject to teacher expectations. In Fuller's study it was shown that teacher expectations varied according to the age of the teacher. The findings indicate those teachers over 35 were more extreme in attributing negative behavior to children from single parent families. Teachers under 35 were more likely to attribute more positive behaviors to these same children (Fuller, 1986). These studies seem to indicate that while there may be differences in behavior, some of these may be biased because of teacher expectations.

In the area of attendance, research shows a marked difference. Absenteeism is higher because of added responsibility, not always because of illness. Children from single parent homes often have more chores and have to look after their younger siblings

(Edgar, 1982). In the NAESP staff reports on tardiness, truancy and health issues, it was shown that one parent students, missed 11.10 days per semester while the students from intact families were absent only 7.16 days. In the area of truancy, one parent children are more than twice as likely to skip school as those from intact families (Staff, 1980). In a report by Brown, 1980, students from one parent families made up 41% of the student population but accounted for 56% of the truancies (Brown, 1980).

"It is predicted that the number of single parent children will continue to rise by one million each year" (Roy and Fuqua, 1983). Given this growth potential, other variables do demand attention in the research. Family status, income, and mobility were all strongly influential factors in the literature.

## Methods

### Research Design

A causal-comparative, or ex post facto, design was used in this study. The descriptive nature of the study takes data that already exists and attempts to find the cause.

In this case the family structure was the independent variable. The dependent variables for the study were achievement on a standardized test (the California Achievement Test), school attendance as measured by the Student Information Management System (SIMS), and school behavior as measured by discipline infractions compiled by the teachers. The internal validity remains high in this study, because the dependent variables are all separately measured and the independent variable cannot be manipulated.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of the seventh grade students in Greta Miller's math classes at China Grove Middle School located in China Grove, NC. The students were then divided into two groups (divorced and never divorced) depending on their family's marital status. From a total sample of 88 students, there were 43 students in the divorced group and 45 students in the never divorced group. Thirty students were randomly selected (using a table of random numbers) from each of the two groups.

The students from the never divorced group were

listed on paper and assigned a two digit number. Using a table of random numbers, the last two digits were checked to see it matched the number that was assigned to each student in the population. If the two digit number matched that student was chosen for the sample group. The process continued until 30 subjects were selected from this group. The exact process was then repeated to select 30 students from the divorced group.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study to measure achievement was the California Achievement test. This test has been in existence forms since 1943 (Keyser and Sweetland, 1985). The publisher provides much information on its norm referencing, validity, reliability, and bias studies. "Reliability is assessed in terms of internal consistency, error of estimate, short-term test-retest, alternate forms, and fall-spring test-retest. Validity information is presented in the form of correlations with other tests" (Keyser and Sweetland, 1985 p. 118).

The behavior instrument was designed by the

teachers at China Grove Middle School and follows the guidelines of the Assertive Discipline Plan. The researchers realize that this component is subject to teacher perception.

Procedures

In the winter of 1991, demographic, academic, behavioral, and attendance data was collected on the students in Greta Miller's seventh grade math classes. This was done with permission of the principal at China Grove Middle School. Several students were eliminated from the study because they had moved, records were unavailable, or had experienced the death of a parent. The remaining 88 students were divided into two groups depending on their family's marital status. Thirty students were then randomly selected for each sample group.

The demographic information was gathered from a survey provided by Ms. Greta Miller to each of her seventh grade students. This information was validated by checking demographic information available through the SIMS and by interview of the students.

The academic achievement information was

collected from the student's cumulative folders. The sixth grade CAT total battery score was collected for each of the students. These were national percentile scores.

The behavior data was collected from a form corresponding to the assertive discipline plan. When a student broke a school rule, the infraction was then recorded by the classroom teacher. The forms, consisting of names of the students, were circulated among the teachers. The infractions were totaled for each student over a 13 week period.

The attendance was measured by data from SIMS. Mrs. Kathy Austin, the SIMS secretary, ran an attendance report for the first five months of the 1990-1991 school year.

The data was put on paper in table form and then into the SPSSX statistical computer program. The major statistics were derived from a T-test on each of the three variables.

## Results

This section summarizes the results according to the T-test analysis of the three variables.

Question: Do students from divorced families score significantly lower ($p < .05$) on the CAT Test than those from intact families?

Comparing the groups on achievement, analysis showed no significant difference ($t = 1.45$; $p = .15$).

---

Insert table 1 here

---

Question: Do students from divorced families exhibit significantly more incidences ($p < .05$) of behavior problems than those from intact families?

Comparing the groups on behavior, research showed that divorce had a statistically significant effect on behavior in school ($t = -3.61$; $p = .001$).

---

Insert table 2 here

---

Question: Do students from divorced families exhibit significantly higher incidences ($p < .05$) of absences than those from intact families?

Comparing the groups on attendance, the data showed no significant difference ($t = .37$; $p = .71$).

---

Insert table 3 here

---

## Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

Upon reviewing research on divorce, it was shown that divorce did have an effect on achievement, behavior, and attendance. In this study behavior was the only effected variable. Because student behavior may be subject to teacher perception, it should be mentioned that the findings of this research on behavior may also be subject to teacher bias.

It should be noted that the scores on the CAT test for achievement, although not statistically significant, do show a large difference in their total battery means. The difference was a variance of 11 percentile points between the two groups. This was not statistically significant but is a large variance.

The implications of this study are many for educators and parents. Concerning behavior, teachers and counselors can expect to see changes in student behavior due to divorce. This research, along with others cited, shows a significant effect on behavior.

Educators should be aware of physical changes, mood changes, interpersonal struggles and social conflicts.

Administrators should keep up to date records on children from divorced homes. Teachers can choose textbooks and classroom materials that reflect nonstereotypical families. Parents and educators can help students adjust and should involve themselves in the student's transition from intact to divorced family structures. Parents should work with educators and communicate changes that occur in the home.

Finally, further research on the topic of divorce and achievement should be done and comparisons made considering cultural and ethnic variables. This research confined itself to a rural school which is not representative of the general population. In studying these variables, students from divorced homes can be better served by parent, educators, administrators, and counselors.

References

Berger, Susan R., Rohna A. Shoul and Susan Warschauer. (1989, September) Children of Divorce. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Brown, Frank B. (1980, April). A Study of the School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families. Phi Delta Kappan, 61 537-540.

Carter, Hugh and Paul C. Glick. (1978). Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study. (revised ed.) Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Corey, Gerald. (1986). Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy . Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cote Publishing Company.

Crain, William C. (1985). Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Dawson, Patricia. (1981). The Effect of the Single-Parent Family on Academic Achievement. US: Illinois. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 241604.

Edgar, Don and Freya Headlam. (1982) One-Parent Families and Educational Disadvantage. Working Paper No. 4 (Report No. ISBN-0-642-88617-2). Melbourne, Australia: Institute of Family Studies.

Fuller, Mary Lou. (1986, May). Teachers' Perceptions of Children from Intact and Single-Parent Families. The School Counselor 33, 365-374.

Gavin, James P. (1984, November). Children of Divorce-A Challenge for Middle School Teachers. Middle School Journal 16, 6-7.

Hammond, Janice M. (1979, November). A comparison of Elementary Children from Divorced and Intact Families. Phi Delta Kappan. 61, 219.

Kelly, Joan B. and Judith S. Wallerstein. (1979, October). Children of Divorce. National Elementary Principal. 58-59, 51-56.

Keyser, Daniel J. and Richard C. Sweetland. (1985). Test Critiques. 3, 111-123. Monterey, California: CTB/McGraw Hill.

Kohn, Sherwood Davidson. (1979, October). Coping with Family Change. National Elementary Principal 58-59, 41-50

Morgan, Sharon. (1985). Children in Crises. San Diago, California: College Hill Press.

Roy, Crystal M. and Dale R. Fuqua. (1983, January). Social Support Systems and Academic Performance of Single-Parent Students. The School Counselor, 30, 183-191.

Russell, Ivan L. (1983, November). Behavior Problems of Children from Broken and Intact Homes. Journal Educational Sociology. 31, 124-129.

SPSS. Inc. (1983). SPSSX Users Guide. New York: McGraw Hill.

Staff. (1980, September). One-Parent Families and their Children. Principal, 60 31-39.

Warga, Richard G. (1983). Personal Awareness: A Psychology of Adjustment. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Voza, Judith. (1984). A Comparison of Reading Scores of Children from One-Parent and Two-Parent Families. M.A. Thesis, Kean college of New Jersey. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service NO. ED 243097.

Zakariya, Sally Banks. (1982, September). Another Look at the Children of Divorce: Summary Report of the Study of School Needs of One-Parent Children. Principal, 62, 34-38.

Appendix

Limitations/ Delimitations

The population being at one school was a limitation. The test scores were taken from the California Achievement Test in the spring of 1990 and testing was administered by different personnel. The racial mix did not reflect the general population. Given that behavior is subjective to teacher perception, data obtained on behavior may be biased. There were time constraints to the study therefore there was not enough time for collection of attendance data.

Definition of terms

The following terms were used in this study and are defined here to provide clarity.

Divorce: "A final decree of absolute divorce terminates the legal status of husband and wife, formalizes financial and parental obligations between spouses, and permits each of them to remarry." (Carter and Glick, 1978 p.26)

SIMS: A data collection computer program called Student Information Management System.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance, Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value.

Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement

| Groups | Mean | Standard Deviation | t Value | p Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never divorced | 67.87 | 28.27 | 1.45 | .15 |
| Divorced | 57.40 | 27.49 | 1.45 | .15 |

Table 2

Analysis of Variance, Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value.

Dependent Variable: Behavior

| Groups | Mean | Standard Deviation | t Value | p Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never divorced | 5.73 | 8.15 | -3.61 | .001 |
| Divorced | 16.50 | 14.15 | -3.61 | .001 |

Table 3

Analysis of Variance, Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value.

Dependent Variable: Attendance

| Groups | Mean | Standard Deviation | t Value | p Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never divorced | 4.47 | 4.18 | .37 | .71 |
| Divorced | 4.00 | 3.46 | .37 | .71 |

Name:

Address

City, State, Zip

Race:

Age:

Sex:

Birth date:

Reside with:

Mother Only:

Father Only:

Mother and Father

Mother and Stepfather:

Stepmother and Father:

Are both parents living?

Do you have brothers and/or Sisters?

Brothers:

Sisters:

Birth Order:



BEST COPY AVAILABLE